

Module 18  
Risk Assessment

The Topic:

**R**isk Assessment poses a great challenge for new worker as it involves knowledge in many different areas

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this training, participants will be able to:

- Define risk assessment and its function
- Assess risk factors in the five domains
  - Physical and functional status
  - Mental health status and capacity
  - Living environment
  - Financial
  - Social (risk posed by others, including caretakers and family members)
- Assess overall levels of risk in terms of severity and urgency)
- Describe the benefits and limitations of risk assessment tools
- Develop risk reduction service plans

Supervisor Activities:

**T**he following pages contain a variety of activities that may be used with new workers and processed in individual or group supervision. Please read the Risk Assessment Trainer's Manual as it will give you a wealth of didactic material and resources to support these activities.

Selected Reading:

**T**erry Fulmer PhD, RN, FAAN, Lisa Guadagno BS, MPA, Carmel Bitondo MD, Marie Therese Connolly JD. "Progress in Elder Abuse Screening and Assessment Instruments" Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, Volume pages 297-304, February 2004



On the Job Training: Defining Risk Assessment and Its Function

**H**ave new workers receive an intake call. Ask them to identify possible risk factors from the information provided to them by the referring party. Ask them the following questions and have them explain/justify their answers.

- Does the situation meet the criteria of a client being at risk? (*This requires their knowledge of the legal guidelines of your APS statute/program*).
- Do you need to go out immediately or can you wait until after you have handled more

**urgent cases?** (*This requires their knowledge of APS policy as well as awareness of what constitutes immediate risk*)

- **Are elders/dependent adults in immediate danger?** (*This requires them to ask specific questions about what the referring party observed as well as asking about support systems, medical issues, psychiatric history, condition of the home, etc*)
- **Why are they calling now? Did something just happen?** (*This may require them getting some history of previous calls, cases, relationship issues*)
- **Does the client understand what's going on?** (*This requires them to ascertain details of what was observed, the credibility/professional judgment of the referring party*)
- **Is the client capable of making decisions?** (*Who says so and how do they know? What has been tried in the past?*)
- **What's at risk** (life, health, property)? (*This will help them decide what kind of intervention may be needed and what other disciplines or collaterals need to be contacted*)
- **What are the consequences of delay?** (*Is there someone available to supervise? If a perpetrator is arrested, can the victim manage alone?*)
- **Are emergency or protective measures and services are needed?** (*This requires them know*

*when it is appropriate to call law enforcement or mental health screeners*)

Stress how workers begin the risk assessment process at intake. Explain how, although information at intake is not always reliable, effective questioning can help guide them in determining risk. Discuss with them how they might explore some of these risk factors/indicators prior to making a visit (exploration of previous records, contacting law enforcement, contacting collaterals).

Share: Handout "What is Risk Assessment" if they have not had the classroom training.



## Handout “What is Risk Assessment?”

### What is Risk Assessment?

An analysis that uses information from investigations, research, and practice experience, to:

- Help workers protect clients’ safety, health, independence, and rights.
- Help managers optimize resources and ensuring quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness.

### How Does Risk Assessment Help Workers?

- Plan interviews/investigations
- Develop plans to ensure clients’ immediate safety and reduce future risk
- Prioritize cases, allocate time and resources
- Detect changes over time
- Determine if interventions are successful in reducing risk
- Decide when to close cases

### How Does Risk Assessment Help Managers?

- Target services to those in greatest need
- Reduce the rate of re-referrals
- Increase consistency and accuracy in assessment and case management
- More effectively target outreach
- Assign cases equitably
- Evaluate workers’ performance
- Understand risk factors, patterns, trends, and clients



**Transfer of Learning:** 5 Domains of Risk, Assess Levels of Risk

**R**eview the 5 domains of risk that are in the manual. On a new case assigned to the worker, have them investigate the case and evaluate risk in the *Five Domains of Risk* by using the *Levels of Risk* (low, medium, high) and the *3 S's of Risk* (Soon, Severe, Sure).

Discuss it in supervision or in a group setting with other workers. Help them process the 5 domains of risk asking them specific questions relating to each domain.

Five Domains of Risk

1. Health and Functional Status
2. Mental Health status and capacity
3. Living environment
4. Financial
5. Social

**Consider these questions**

1. Is this person in poor health? Do they need help with daily activities?
2. Are they capable making decisions for themselves? Do they have other mental health problems like depression, anxiety, or substance abuse?
3. What about their living environment? Are they in a safe and protected environment? Is their home unsafe or unhealthy?
4. What's their financial situation? Do they have the resources they need? Are their assets in jeopardy?
5. Finally, we want to know if there are other people in clients' lives who can help, or are there others who pose a danger to them.

For each domain ask: What is the Level of Risk? Is it low, medium or high?

- How **Soon** might the client be harmed?
- How **Severe** might the harm be?
- How **Sure** are you that the harm will occur? (this can also be thought of in terms of likelihood)



**Case vignette:** Risk Factors and Strengths

**H**ave new worker read the case vignette below and identify the risk factors as well as the strengths.

Maria Pedromas is an 82 year old widow who has raised 7 children. She is an insulin dependent diabetic who has had 3 toes amputated. She has some difficulty ambulating and is not compliant with her diabetic diet. Her youngest son Petro, age 47, has a history of drug use and drug dealing and has been incarcerated 4 times, most recently charged with assault during a drug bust. He has lived with his mother between incarcerations, and has been with her for the last year. Petro does not work. Ms. Pedromas' other children live nearby. Most are raising their own children and grandchildren. They maintain contact with their mother but are very frustrated with their mother's loyalty to Pedro. They believe that Petro is taking money and not providing any care for their mother. They report that often they have to bring food because there is not sufficient food in the house. Ms. Pedromas is a member of the Pentecostal church but has not been able to attend recently because of her medical conditions.



*Examples:*

*Strengths: involvement with children, church*

*Risk factors: non-compliance with diabetic diet, insufficient food, financial exploitation*

**Role Play:** Assess Overall Levels of Risk



**H**aving new workers participate in role plays is an excellent way for them to practice skills before doing them “live.” Although role plays can be anxiety producing for many, this role play can be done with you and the worker in individual supervision or in a small group where there are some observers to give feedback. In this role play, the worker will have to interview the “client (you) to assess the level of risk and determine the next steps to be taken.

**Client Role:** *(this is a guideline for you... feel free to add to the character so the worker will have more “meat” to work with. Do not share this with the worker: let her/him ask you questions and see if those questions are appropriate and lead to a good assessment)*

**Y**ou are Agnes Grimstead. You are 78 years old and have been married to your husband Joe for 55 years. Joe always drank a lot, especially on weekends, but you were used to that since your dad was a drinker too. When Joe drank, he would scare the 3 children, often hitting them and threatening them. All of them left the house at a young age and now live in other states. They call once in a while but do not visit. They have 3 grown children, all moved far away. Joe has hit you at various times throughout the marriage, even sent you to the hospital a few times. You depended on him financially and never thought about leaving. He always apologized and

bought you flowers and promised to behave. Lately it seems to be getting worse. You wonder if it is because you have gained so much weight and fall a lot, but it is harder getting out of his way. You are feeling very sad.

**Worker Role:**

**Y**ou are going to visit Agnes Grimstead, age 78, because of an allegation of physical abuse by her husband Joe. The referral came from a visiting nurse, who has been involved since Mrs. Grimstead’s last hospitalization due to a fall. The nurse described Mrs. Grimstead as very obese and dirty. She also observed bruises on Mrs. Grimstead’s arm and a fading bruise on her face. When the nurse questioned this injury, Mrs. Grimstead stated that Joe gets out of hand when he drinks. She stated that she was used to his behavior and usually just goes in another room, but recently she has been getting dizzy spells and sometimes can’t get out of his way on time. The visiting nurse described Mrs. Grimstead as frail and a bit depressed. The nurse learned that the Grimsteads have 3 children, but all live in other states and have little contact with their parents.

You are to interview Mrs. Grimstead and assess her situation for the type(s) and level of risk she may be experiencing. In your interview first try to make her comfortable and develop rapport, and then ask questions that help you ascertain how she sees her situation, how she is functioning, and how dangerous the situation may be.

## Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment: Assessing risks and severity of risks

Role Play: Sample Questions for Discussion

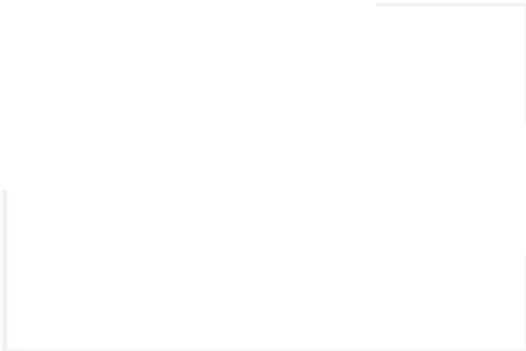
1. What was the experience like for you as the worker in this case?



2. What were your challenges in getting the information you needed?



3. What were the risk factors that you assessed in this interview?



4. What domains did those risk factors relate to?



5. What was the level of risk for Mrs. Grimstead?



6. Do you need further information to complete your risk assessment? What information and where/how would you obtain it?



7. What would your next steps be?



**Written Activity:** Benefits and Limitations of Risk Assessment Tools

**E**very APS program uses a different assessment tool. Select an assessment tool that is used in your program and ask the new worker to complete it after assessing a new case. Review the written assessment with the worker and ask for the following feedback:



- How useful was the tool?
- Did it account for all risk factors?
- Did it help guide you in assessing the level of risk?
- What parts were most helpful/not helpful?
- What would help you in putting your assessment in writing?



**Case Consultation:** Developing Risk Reduction Service Plans

Brainstorming

**H**ave new workers discuss ways to reduce risk in the 5 domains. This discussion can be in the abstract or in reference to a specific case.



Health and Functional Status

Mental Health Status and Capacity

Living Environment

Financial

Social